

## WELCOME TO 2002... AND THE NEW BABYLAND

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"...we have to become a lot smarter in how we deliver services."

-Mary P. Smith

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**A**s the year 2001 came to a close, Mary Palmer Smith, Founder and Executive Director of Babyland Family Services, looked back on a year of great successes, daunting challenges, a substantial change in the long-time relationship with New Community Corporation (NCC), and the emergence of a "new" re-energized and re-focused Babyland.

Sitting in her office at Babyland's headquarters in Newark, New Jersey, Mrs. Smith talked about the future of the organization that began as Babyland Nursery in 1969 in the **Scudder Homes** public housing project. In a community still dazed by the **Riots of 1967**, she led an interracial coalition of Newark and suburban women who were committed to providing infant child care services so that inner city women could get jobs while their children thrived in a nurturing environment.



Babyland was the first Infant Day Care Center in New Jersey, and one of the first in the nation. Look for more "Babyland Firsts" in the future.

Thirty-four years later, with the agency's name changed to reflect the vast array of social services it now provides, Babyland Family Services is in a period of growth, planning and renewal that rivals any time in the organization's remarkable history. The excitement is palpable, prompting the spontaneous phase "the New Babyland" to pop up throughout the comprehensive child, family, staff and community development programs it provides.

"In light of the fast-paced world influenced by technology, the New Babyland recognizes that to meet the needs of the poor--and to be able to empower families to become economically self-sufficient--we have to become a lot smarter in how we deliver services," said Mrs. Smith.

"We recognize that computer technology is one way to do that," she added. "We're currently developing an overall technology plan that will be implemented over the next three to five years."

Central to Babyland's technology strategy will be the opening of the Babyland Training & Technology Center in a restored former bank building in Newark's South Ward. The Technology Center, which has received almost one million dollars in funding from a special appropriation, will be a state-of-the art facility. Babyland is grateful for the strong support from the entire New Jersey delegation, especially Senators Torricelli and Corzine and Congressmen Menendez and Payne, as well as the City of Newark, Mayor Sharpe James and the City Council.

"The Technology Center will network all of our 14 sites so that Babyland staff and our parents can communicate via online services," said Martin Schneider, Deputy Director, Planning, Development, and Support Services at Babyland. "It will also be a true Community Computer Center, open to the public, so that residents can learn how to use the Internet practically in their everyday lives, receive training to enhance employment opportunities, and initiate on-line education."

Mr. Schneider grows animated when he talks about Babyland's growing physical presence in the community. "What's so exciting about the coming year is that we now own three of our 14 sites. Until recently, Babyland leased all of its facilities, including a number of sites that New Community Corporation helped to develop. But we have been able to acquire a new site that will be the home of our Training and Technology Center. The City of Newark, PNC Bank and New Jersey Redevelopment Authority were instrumental in making that a reality. Ownership means respect, permanency, and roots--a stake--in the community."

Mention of the New Community Corporation (a community development organization also based in Newark, New Jersey) prompts a visitor to ask the question that's been raised countless times over the past year--from Broad Street in Newark to Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C.: "What's going on between Babyland and New Community?"



Babyland will be bringing the benefits of technology to inner city children and families.

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Although the two organizations were always separate corporations, they were so closely linked for over thirty years that many people came to see Babyland and New Community as part of the same organization. In fact, Mary Smith served as a board member and the treasurer--as well as a highly-visible spokesperson--for NCC for three decades.

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"It made sense at this point in our maturity that we move in different directions," said Mrs. Smith, in response to the query. "I think people need to understand why we networked in the first place. We were two small organizations and we had different missions. New Community was all about developing housing and economic development. Babyland was all about human development--we saw ourselves as a human services agency. So it made sense for New Community to develop facilities for us. Babyland and New Community were so closely aligned because we complemented each other."

"We have outgrown each other as the years went by," she added. "Babyland is now a \$15 million a year agency. We needed to move forward. It just made sense at this point, when we reviewed our strategic goals, that Babyland and New Community should go in different directions."

"We appreciate what we have done for each other in helping our community," Mrs. Smith added. "We still buy some services from New Community and lease some facilities from them. But we have always been totally separate and distinct agencies, because we do have different approaches and different goals."



"Building on what we do best"--more Babyland child care centers are planned.

**to graduate from high school and go on to college and receive good jobs.**

In guiding the New Babyland, one need only look at its Mission Statement, especially the line that reads: *to create a safe and nurturing community.*

Mrs. Smith observed, "In the past 35 years, from the children we have been able to trace, we know that with the foundation they receive at Babyland, and with good schooling when they leave us, that they are excellent candidates

"But we need to go a step further. Children need more than a good education. Children get lost in a community that is not a nurturing community; where people are selling drugs on the corner or where there are no activities for the children. We need to have a comprehensive approach and deal with all aspects of life; helping parents to become economically independent, but also in the process, we have to make the community safe, and attractive and healthy for children to grow up in."

Babyland's commitment to the neighborhoods of Newark will be demonstrated with the construction of the agency's central administrative office. "Our new central headquarters will make a statement to the city that we're here to stay, and that we're responsive to the needs of the community," said Mr. Schneider.



Babyland's new facilities will greatly expand the agency's acclaimed training programs.

"This building will be new construction and will include a large child care center, a pediatric health clinic, and a technology and training center," he added. "The City of Newark has been a good partner with Babyland, and we want them to know that Babyland Family Services is committed to working with the city to continue the remarkable Renaissance of Newark."



Mary Smith Goes to Washington: A greater advocacy role is planned by Babyland.

On track for the year 2002 and into the future is Babyland's desire to play a greater advocacy role. "We're well aware of the budget straits that the State of New Jersey is in," said Mr. Schneider, "but even in an economic slowdown, it is all the more important for the residents in our community to get a job. Child care is critical--especially infant care."

"Mrs. Smith recently stated that Babyland needs to re-commit ourselves to our parents and stay true to our mission," said Mr. Schneider. "That really lays the foundation for our future growth."



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